PART II

Four Holy Places of Pilgrimage

Contents

1. Lumbini, Birthplace of the Buddha

1.1 How to reach there

Lumbini is located in Nepal, near the Indian border town of **Sonauli**. Nowadays one can apply for a Nepalese visa in Kuala Lumpur in order to enter the country. From the border, a good road leads to Lumbini, about 20 km away. All distances are approximate.

1.2 Religious Significance [3, 25, 26]

After fulfilling the practice of the Ten Perfections (*Paramis*) for four incalculables (*asankheyya*) and a hundred thousand world cycles (*kappa*), the *Bodhisatta* or Future Gotama Buddha took conception in the womb of **Maya Devi**, the queen of **Suddhodana**, chief of a small **Sakyan** republic, just across the present Indo-Nepalese border. On the full-moon day of May in 623 BC, Maya Devi was travelling in state from the Sakyan capital of **Kapilavatthu,** to **Devadaha,** her parents' home to deliver her first child in keeping with the ancient tradition of her people. Along the way she passed through **Lumbini Garden**, a pleasure grove of Sala trees which were then in full bloom. Stopping to admire the flowering trees and plants, she began to feel the pangs of childbirth. Quickly she summoned her female attendants to put up a curtain around her. Holding the branch of a Sala tree to support herself, she gave birth to the *Bodhisatta* while standing up. According to *Majjhima Sutta* No. 123, as soon as the *Bodhisatta* was born, he took seven steps to the North and declared his position in the world with these words:

Aggo' ham asmi lokassa --	I am the chief in the world.
Jetto' ham asmi lokassa --	I am the highest in the world.
Setto' ham asmi lokassa --	I am the noblest in the world.
Ayam antima jati --	This is my last birth.
Natthi dani punabbhavo --	There is no more becoming for me.

As soon as the *Bodhisatta* was born, a great immeasurable light surpassing the radiance of the gods appeared, penetrating even those abysmal world inter-spaces of darkness where the sun and moon cannot make their light prevail. The ten thousand-fold world system shook, quaked and trembled and there too a great immeasurable light appeared to herald the birth of the *Bodhisatta.*

1.3 Historical Background [5, 27]

In 249 BC, the great Mauryan emperor Asoka, who ruled nearly the whole of India from 273 to 236 BC, visited Lumbini as part of his pilgrimage to the sacred Buddhist places and worshipped in person the sacred spot where the Buddha was born. To commemorate his visit, he built a stone pillar, which bears an inscription in Brahmi script to record the event for posterity. The inscription engraved on the pillar in five lines reads (**Translation**):

"*Twenty years after his coronation, King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, visited this spot in person and worshipped at this place because here Buddha Sakyamuni was born. He caused to make a stone (capital) representing a horse and he caused this stone pillar to be erected. Because the Buddha was born here, he made the village of Lumbini free from taxes and subject to pay only one-eighth of the produce as land revenue instead of the usual rate*."

(**Note**: The coronation of Asoka took place in 269 BC, four years after his reign.)

After the devastation of Buddhist shrines in India by the Muslims in the 13th century AD, Lumbini was deserted and eventually engulfed by the tarai forests. In 1896, the German archeologist **Dr. Alois A. Fuhrer**, while wandering in the Nepalese tarai in search of the legendary site, came across a stone pillar and ascertained beyond doubt it was indeed the birthplace of the Lord Buddha. The Lumbini pillar (also known as the Rummindei pillar) stands today majestically proclaiming that here the Buddha was born.

1.4 Objects of Interest [27, 28]

a) Asokan Pillar

Upon entering Lumbini Garden, the most visible landmark is a tall pillar surrounded by an iron fence. This is the famous Lumbini Pillar erected by King Asoka in 249 BC. Originally it had a horse capital on top but afterwards it was struck by lightning and broken in the middle leaving 6.7 m standing without the horse capital. It is this pillar with its inscription that confirmed this site as the Buddha's birthplace.

b) Sanctum-Sanctorum: Exact Spot of Buddha's Birthplace

The area just in front of the Asokan column was formerly the site of the old Maya Devi temple, a white box-shaped structure built in 1939 by the local administrator Keshar Shumser (Plate 1). It was dismantled in 1992 for archeological excavations to be carried out underneath the floor. On 4 February 1996, a team of UN-sponsored archeologists announced the discovery of the Buddha's birthplace beneath the temple's foundation. The archeologists excavated 15 chambers to a depth of about 5 m, and found a commemorative stone slab shaped like a womb atop a platform of seven layers of bricks dating back to the 3rd century BC, pinpointing the **exact spot of the Buddha's birthplace**, the Sanctum-Sanctorum. According to ancient Buddhist literature, when King Asoka visited Lumbini in 249 BC, he placed a "**marker stone**" on top of a pile of bricks as a commemorative monument, for himself and posterity to worship.

Since the excavation was completed in 1996, the site has remained closed to the public, and the excavations covered by a tin roof and tarpaulin until 2001 (Plate 2). Today a new temple (Plate 3) has been built to house the ancient Nativity Sculpture, which was consecrated on Wesak Day in 26 May 2003. Inside pilgrims can circumambulate the excavated ruins of the temple complex and the Asokan shrine put up in the 3rd century BC. The historical "marker stone" said to pinpoint the spot where Mayadevi gave birth to Prince Siddhattha, is covered with bulletproof glass to make sure that it is well protected.

c) Nativity Sculpture

In May 2003, the ancient stone sculpture depicting the **Nativity of the Buddha** was placed in the new temple complex built over the exact spot of the Buddha's birthplace. The sculpture dates back to 4th century AD and contains a bas-relief image of Maya Devi, mother of the Lord, holding a branch of the Sala tree with her right hand, her left hand resting on her hips. On her right side supporting her is a woman, presumably her sister Maha Pajapati. Beyond the latter is the slightly bent figure of Sakka Devaraja, who is in the attitude of receiving the newborn child. Below is a small figure of Prince Siddhattha with a halo around his head, standing on a lotus pedestal.

d) Puskarni – the sacred pond

South of the Asokan pillar is the famous sacred pond – **Puskarni,** believed to be the same pond in which Maya Devi washed herself before giving birth to the *Bodhisatta.*

e) Temples & Meditation Centres in Lumbini

The Nepalese *Vihara* is built inside Lumbini Garden. It is a Theravada monastery run by an old Nepalese *bhikkhu*. The Tibetan and Myanmar *viharas* and the Panditarama Meditation Centre are farther away, outside the garden complex. Pilgrims are advised to visit these places to pay their respects to the *Sangha*, whose presence has sanctified the environment of Lumbini.

1.5 Kapilavatthu, Kingdom of the Sakyas [19, 30]

Kapilavatthu, capital of the country of the Sakyans where the Buddha spent the first 29 years of his life before leaving home in quest of the Deathless, has been a matter of controversy for nearly a century. There are two claimants to the site of **Kapilavastu**, namely: **Piprahwa** in Basti District of Uttar Pradesh, India and **Tilaurakot** 25km west of Lumbini in Nepal. According to Basanta Bidari[19], the Indian claim was based on seals and inscriptions over the lid of a pot from the 2nd century AD that was found during excavations of the so-called palace at Piprahwa. The inscriptions read:

> *"Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu mahasanghasa"* and
> *"Om devaputra vihare kapilvastu bhikshu sanghasa"*

The title *Devaputra* refers to the **Kushana king Kanishka** who built the biggest *vihara* at Piprahwa and renovated the main *stupa* there. These inscriptions clearly indicate that the monasteries belonged to the community of monks at Kapilavastu and so the site was not that of a palace. While the Indian claim is based on seals, pots and inscriptions, the Nepalese claim appears to be strongly supported by the discovery of important monuments and Asokan pillars at nearby Niglihawa and Gotihawa. In fact, the Chinese pilgrims Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang mentioned the nirvana *stupas* of Kanakamuni and Kakusandha Buddhas and the *stupa* of Sakyamuni Buddha at Ramagrama but they did not describe the nirvana *stupa* of Sakyamuni Buddha at or near the city of Kapilavastu, which the Indians claimed to have excavated at Piprahwa!

a) Identification of Tilaurakot as site of ancient Kapilavastu

Located some 27 km west of Lumbini, are the ruins of the ancient Sakyan city of Kapilavatthu. The site has been identified with the archeological mound at Tilaurakot ('*kot*' or '*kota*' = fortified area). Excavations of these ruins by the Nepalese Archeology Department

have exposed mounds of old *stupas* and monasteries, made of kiln-burnt bricks and clay-mortar. The remains are surrounded by a moat and the walls of the city are made of bricks. The fortified area of the site is 518 m running north to south and 396 m from east to west, roughly 20.5 hectares. On the basis of the archeological findings, the outer city of common citizens is very extensive and fits the reported size of Kapilavatthu as narrated by Hsüan Tsang in the Si-yü-ki.

These excavations were successively carried out by Fuhrer (1895); Mukherji (1899); Devala Mitra (1962); Mishra (1967-72); and a Japanese team led by Nakamura (1970-71). The general consensus among most scholars today is that Tilaurakot in Nepal is the site of old Kapilavatthu while Piprahwa in India is the site of the new Kapilavatthu established after the destruction of the old one by Vidudabha. (See **Note 10,** page 86 for an account of the destruction of Kapilavatthu by Vidudabha).

Pilgrims visiting Lumbini should spend an extra day to visit Tilaurakot where they can still see the site of the **Eastern Gate** called the *Mahabhinikkhamanam Dvara* (Great Renunciation Gate). It was from here that the *Bodhisatta* set out on his quest for Enlightenment on the night of the fullmoon of *Asalha* (July) in 594 BC when he was twenty-nine years old. In the vicinity of Tilaurakot, there are several Buddhist sites of significance, notably:

b) Niglihawa, Birthplace of Kanakamuni Buddha

Niglihawa, 3 km northeast of Tilaurakot, is believed to be the ancient town of Sobhavati, birthplace of **Kanakamuni Buddha**. At the time of his birth, a heavy shower of gold fell over the whole of Jambudipa. Taking this “coming down of gold” as an omen, he was named **Kanakagamana** (*kanaka* = gold, *agamana* = coming). Over time, the original name Kanakagamana has taken the corrupt form of **Konagamana**. Emperor Asoka visited this place in 249 B.C. during his pilgrimage and erected a pillar to commemorate the event.

Today, the Asokan pillar can still be seen but it is broken into two pieces. The upper portion is 4.6 m long while nearly 1.5 m of the lower portion stands above ground slightly tilted. The inscription in Brahmi script on the pillar reads: "*King Piyadassi, Beloved of Gods, having been crowned king fourteen years, increased the stupa of Buddha Kanakamuni to double its original size. Twenty years after his coronation, he came himself and worshipped it*."

c) Gotihawa, Birthplace of Kakusandha Buddha

Gotihawa, 7 km southwest of Tilaurakot, is believed to be the site of the ancient city of Khemavati, birthplace of **Kakusandha Buddha.** Emperor Asoka visited it too at the same time and erected a pillar to record his visit. The pillar is broken and only the lower portion of about 3 m still stands in situ, but below ground level. Hsüan Tsang in the Si-yü-ki mentioned both the Asokan pillars described when he visited Kapilavatthu in 637 AD. At that time, each had a lion-head capital at the top.

d) Kudan, Site of Nigrodharama (Banyan Grove)

At Kudan is a site, which scholars believe to be the *Nigrodharama* or Banyan Grove, which King Suddhodana offered to the Buddha when he visited Kapilavastu. It was here that **Ven. Rahula** was ordained when he came to ask for his inheritance from the Buddha. The remains of a brick foundation wall of an ancient monastery, believed to be built during Buddha's time, still stands at the site.

e) Sagarhawa, Site of Massacre of the Sakyans

Sagarhawa, situated near Niglihawa is believed to be the site where Vidudabha massacred the Sakyans. The locals call it Lambu Sagar or 'Long Pond' because of the presence of a huge rectangular pond.

From Niglihawa, one can be easily reach Sagarhawa by passing through Niglihawa village and crossing the canal bridge.

Note 10 Vidudabha's attack of Kapilavatthu and the massacre of the Sakyans took place about a year prior to the Buddha's *Parinibbana.* The whole episode is narrated in Dhammapada Commentary iv.3: 29.30.

King Pasenadi of Kosala was a great admirer of the Buddha. His army chief was Dighakarayana, a nephew of his former commander-in-chief General Bandhula whom King Pasenadi had betrayed and put to death. Thus Dighakarayana bore a deep hatred against King Pasenadi for the death of his uncle. One day while King Pasenadi was visiting the Buddha in the Sakyan village of Ulumpa, he handed the royal insignia to Dighakarayana for safekeeping. Instead the latter rode off and handed them to Pasenadi's son Prince Vidudabha, effectively making the latter the new king of Kosala. When King Pasenadi came to know that he had been usurped, he decided to turn to his nephew Ajatasattu of Magadha for help. On the long journey to Rajagaha, he fell sick and died outside the city gates. When Ajatasattu came to know of the death of his uncle, he gave him a royal burial. In a show of indignation, he ordered an attack on his cousin Vidudabha but soon allowed his ministers to dissuade him because with the old king dead, such a move would not be beneficial to both parties.

Now Vidudabha was the result of a union between King Pasenadi and Vasabhakhattiya, daughter born of the slave-woman of Sakyan chief Mahanama. Earlier King Pasenadi, wishing to marry into the Sakyan clan so that he could become the Buddha's relative, had sent emissaries to Kapilavatthu with the request for the hand of a Sakyan princess. Although the Sakyans did not like the idea, they did not wish to offend him. They replied that they would comply but instead of a Sakyan princess, they sent a beautiful girl born of Mahanama and a slave-woman. King Pasenadi made that girl one of his chief queens and subsequently, she bore him a son Vidudabha. When Vidudabha was sixteen, he decided to pay a visit to his maternal grandparents in Kapilavatthu. Hearing of his visit, the Sakyans sent all the princes junior to him away to a neighbouring village to avoid paying respects to him but they accorded him all the hospitality.

After staying a few days in Kapilavatthu, Vidudabha and his entourage left for home. A servant used milk to wash the seat that Vidudabha had sat

upon in the resthouse. As she was washing, she remarked contemptuously: "*This is the seat on which sat the son of the slave girl Vasabhakhattiya*."

One of Vidudabha's aides, who had returned to fetch the sword he left behind, heard the remark and enquired into the matter. Learning that Vasabhakhattiya was the daughter of a slave-woman of Mahanama, he spread the news among the army. When Vidudabha heard the news, he was filled with rage and vowed to kill the Sakyans when he became king. When the party returned to Savatthi, the ministers informed King Pasenadi about the incident. The king was very angry at being deceived, cut off the royal honours, which had been bestowed on Vasabhakhattiya and her son, and degraded them to the condition of slaves. Thus Vidudabha bore a deep grudge against the Sakyans.

When the Buddha heard about the matter, he pointed out to King Pasenadi that Vasabhakhattiya was the daughter of a king. Although her mother was a slave-woman, it was not important because her status was determined by the status of her father not her mother. The king was pleased with the reasoning and restored both mother and son to their former honours.

When Vidudabha became king, he remembered the humiliation he had suffered on account of the Sakyans and assembled an army to attack them. Although the Buddha tried to intervene three times, he could not avert the disaster. The Buddha realized that his kinsmen had to face the consequence of the evil deed that they had committed in their past lives by throwing poison into the river. Finally Vidudabha marched on the Sakyan clan and massacred them all except the followers of Mahanama and others who had escaped. Vidudabha died in a flood shortly after attacking Kapilavathu. Later Ajatasattu invaded Kosala and conquered the country during the Buddha's 44^{th} Vassa. That the Sakyans (probably Mahanama's followers who were spared by Vidudabha and other survivors) continued to occupy Kapilavatthu is shown by the fact that when Buddha passed away in Kushinagar a year later, the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu came with an army to claim a share of his relics over which they erected a stupa.

1.6 Ramagama & Devadaha, Kingdom of Koliyas

a) How to reach there

Ramagama lies 4 km south of the town of Parasi in Nawalparasi district about 20 km from Bhairawa. The journey from Bhairawa passes the scenic **Rohini River** that separates the kingdoms of the Sakyas and the Koliyas. These two tribes almost went to war over its waters but the Buddha intervened to end the quarrel. From Parasi, the all weather road to Ramagama is mostly unpaved and bumpy but passes through scenic rural villages.

b) Religious Significance

The Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana* at Kusinara on the full-moon day of Wesak 543 BC. After the cremation, his relics were divided into eight equal portions by the brahmin **Dona**, who distributed them to eight clans, namely: King **Ajatasattu** of Magadha, the **Licchavis** of Vesali, the **Sakyas** of Kapilavatthu, the **Bulians** of Allakappa, the **Koliyas** of Ramagama, the brahman of **Vethadipa**, the **Mallas** of Pava and the **Mallas** of Kushinagar.

Dona himself kept the urn used for dividing the relics. When the **Moriyas** of Pipphalavana arrived, it was too late as all the relics had been distributed, so they took from there the ashes. Returning home, these men raised *stupas* to honour them. So it came about that there were eight *stupas* for the relics, a ninth for the urn, and a tenth for the ashes.

According to the '**Thupavamsa**' written during the 12th century AD, **Ven. Mahakassapa**, realizing the risk involved in keeping the bone relics scattered about in several places, implored **King Ajatasattu** to have them securely preserved. Accordingly, the king took out the relics from seven *stupas*, leaving behind what little was required for worship. All the relics collected were taken to Rajagaha and buried underground, whereon was erected a *stupa*. During the 3rd century

BC, **Emperor Asoka** again removed a portion of the relics from all the *stupas* to distribute them in 84,000 new *stupas* he built all over his empire. When he came to **Ramagama** to remove its relics, the **Naga** (serpent) from a nearby lake, apprehending the desecration of the place, appeared in the form of a Brahman and asked him not to do so as he wanted to worship it. So Asoka left empty-handed.

The Chinese pilgrim **Hsuan Tsang** visited **Ramagama or Lan-Mo** in 636-7 AD. It was desolate and sparsely populated. There was a big lake, a *stupa* and a monastery with a novice (*samanera*) as its abbot. To the east of the city was a brick stupa more than 100 feet high. After the *Parinibbana* of the *Tathagata*, the king of this country, having obtained a share of his bone relics built the *stupa*. The *stupa* often issued a bright light. Beside it was a naga's (serpent) pool. A naga at certain periods comes forth and walks here, and changing his form and snake-like exterior and circum-ambulates the *stupa* keeping it to the right in honour. Wild elephants come in herds, gather flowers, and scatter them here. Impressed with this incident a visiting monk decided to stay behind to take care of the *stupa*. He gave up his monk-hood to become a *samanera*, built a house and tilled the land to plant flowers and fruit frees. The people of the neighbouring countries heard about this and donated money to build a monastery and invited the Samanera to be its abbot. Since that time, there has been no interruption in the original appointment and a *samanera* has always been abbot of the monastery.

c) Ramagama Stupa

The remains of a *stupa* and monastery lie on the banks of the **Jahari River** near **Kerwani village**. The large *stupa* mound is about 9 metres high by 21 metres in diameter. In Buddhist Scriptures, the Koliyas of Ramagama are listed among the eight tribes that received a share of the corporeal relics of the Buddha at Kusinara.

The *Stupa* at Ramagama is believed to be the only original undisturbed *dhatu stupa* still standing that contains relics of Lord

Buddha. A research recently carried out by the Nepal Department of Archaeology showed that the different artifacts and antiquities were found near the *stupa*. A Japanese funded memorial is located just to the west of the oxbow lake and a monastery is also planned.

d) Devadaha, Home of Buddha’s mother Maya Devi

Devadaha, capital of the Koliya republic, was the native village of Prince Siddhattha’s mother Maya Devi as well as his aunt Maha Pajapati. It is 35km east of Lumbini and lies at the foothills of the Chure Mountain just south of the Main Himalayan Range. In the Scriptures, it is mentioned in *Devadaha Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya*, as the place where the Buddha censured the Niganthas for their wrong views.

In 2003, the Nepal Archaeology Department reported the discovery of Devdaha at **Panditpur, Baljiria** Village in **Nawalparasi District** after carrying out excavations there for five years. In the course of excavations, the archaeologists found a variety of ancient artifacts belonging to various dynasties of Maurya, Kushan and Gupta, which used to rule over territories on the banks of the Rohini River that demarcates the kingdoms of the Sakyas and Koliyas. The discovery of an ancient 700-metre perimeter wall and a canal for channeling the water from the Rohini River established the fact that the place was the ancient capital city of the Koliya republic.

However an organization called **Devdaha Conservation Academy** states in its website that Devadaha is located in **Bhabanipur**, 1 km south of **Barimai** and **Kanyamai** in the eastern tarai of **Rupandehi** District. It mentioned the presence of a broken Asokan Pillar beside a stone figure of the Sun God, to support its claim.

It is quite likely that the area of Devadaha is very large and occupies an area overlapping both Nawal Parasi and Rupandehi Districts as stated in the above two reports. Since 2007, the political situation in Nepal has returned to calm and it is now possible to visit Devadaha after visiting the Ramagama Stupa in Nawal Parasi District.

2. Bodhgaya, Place of the Buddha's Enlightenment

2.1 How to reach there

Bodhgaya is located in Bihar state, 105 km by road south of Patna or 230 km by road east of Varanasi. All distances are approximate.

2.2 Religious Significance [3, 16, 26]

After the Great Renunciation, the *Bodhisatta* approached two ascetics named **Alara Kalama** and **Udakka Ramaputta** who taught him to attain the Formless *Jhanas*. Although they were the highest attainments at that time, still he was dissatisfied because they did not lead to *Nibbana*. Leaving them, he arrived at an isolated cave on a hill now known as **Dhongra** hill, where he underwent painful and profitless practices for six years until his body became skeleton-like and he nearly died. Realizing the futility of self-mortification, he adopted the Middle Path and started eating again to regain his strength. His five companions, thinking that he had given up the struggle and reverted to luxury, left him. The *Bodhisatta* was now alone in his struggle. One day on the eve of *Wesak*, while waiting to go on alms-round under a Banyan tree, the *Bodhisatta* was offered milk rice in a golden dish by the **Lady Sujata**, daughter of the chieftain of the nearby village of **Senanigama**. After the meal, the *Bodhisatta* took the dish and went to the **Neranjara** river and saying: "*If I am to succeed in becoming a Buddha to-day, let this dish go upstream; but if not, let it go downstream*", he threw it into the water. There it floated to the middle of the river and raced upstream for eighty cubits (37 m) before it sank in a whirlpool.

In the evening, on the way to the *Bodhi* tree, the *Bodhisatta* was offered eight handfuls of grass by the grass-cutter **Sotthiya,** which he placed on his seat under the *Bodhi* tree. Sitting cross-legged, facing the east, the *Bodhisatta* made a resolution, saying: *"Let my skin, sinews and bones become dry. Let my flesh and blood dry up. Never from this seat will I stir until I have attained Buddhahood*."

This was the culmination of his Perfections developed over countless eons that no being, not even Mara and his dreaded army, could unseat the *Bodhisatta* from the *Aparajita* throne. When challenged by Mara, the *Bodhisatta* called upon the earth to bear witness to his Thirty Perfections, by touching the ground with his right hand. Instantly, the earth responded with a great quake that shook and scattered Mara and his forces until they fled in defeat. Before the sun had set, the *Bodhisatta* had vanquished Mara and his forces. Then with mind tranquilized and purified, in the first watch of night, he developed the Knowledge of Past Lives; in the middle watch, the Divine Eye; and in the last watch, he developed the Knowledge of Destruction of Taints and attained Supreme Enlightenment. A **Supreme Buddha** (*Samma-sambuddho*) had arisen in the world on the full moon day of ***Wesak*** in 588 BC.

2.3 Historical Background [9, 127]

Bodhgaya, the scene of the Buddha's Supreme Enlightenment, is the most hallowed place on earth to Buddhists. During the Buddha's time, this place by the banks of the River Neranjara was known as Uruvela. King Asoka was the first to build a temple at this sacred spot. A portrayal of the Asokan temple and other buildings at Bodhgaya has been found in a bas-relief on the **Bharhut Stupa** in Madhya Pradesh. Beginning with Asoka's first visit in 259 BC, countless pilgrims have gravitated to this **cradle of Buddhism** without intermission for more than 1500 years. The devastation of Buddhist *viharas* and shrines by Muslim hordes in the 13th century abruptly halted the flow of pilgrims to Bodhgaya. **Dharmasvamin**, a Tibetan pilgrim, visited Bodhgaya in 1234 AD. He found the place deserted and wrote:

"*Only four monks were found staying (in the vihara). One said, 'It is not good. All have fled in fear of the Turushka soldiery.' They blocked up the door in front of the Mahabodhi image with bricks and plastered it. Near it they placed another image as a substitute*."

When Buddhism declined in India, the Burmese came to the rescue of the decaying Mahabodhi Temple by undertaking repairs during the 14th & 15th centuries. Thereafter, Bodhgaya was forgotten by the Buddhists and the Great Temple fell into ruins. A wandering Hindu ascetic, Mahant Gosain Giri, taking advantage of the situation, established his Math (temple) at Bodhgaya and took control of the Mahabodhi and environment in 1590 AD. Thereafter, the holy Buddhist shrine passed into the hands of successive Mahants (abbot) who used the place for sacrilegious practices. In 1861, Cunningham found the Mahant and his followers indulging in all sorts of non-Buddhist ceremonies at the main shrine**. Sir Edwin Arnold,** author of the "Light of Asia" visited the Mahabodhi Temple in 1885 and reported this observation in the Daily Telegraph in London:

"*The Buddhist world had, indeed, well-nigh forgotten this hallowed and most interesting centre of their faith – the Mecca, the Jerusalem, of million Oriental congregations when I sojourned in Buddhagaya a few years ago. I was so grieved to see Maharatta peasants performing* '*Sharaddh (or Shrada)*' *in such a place, and thousands of precious ancient relics of carved stone inscribed with Sanskrit lying in piles around*."

(**Note**: *Shrada* is a Hindu funereal offering ceremony.)

2.4 Anagarika Dharmapala and Maha Bodhi Society [5, 23]

The battle to regain control of the Mahabodhi Temple by Buddhists began in January 22, 1891 when **Anagarika Dharmapala** visited Bodhgaya. Visibly moved by the neglect and sacrilege of this most sacred shrine, he took the vow, "*I will work on to make this sacred spot to be cared for by our own Bhikkhus*." As a first step, he founded the **Maha Bodhi Society** of Buddhagaya in May 31, 1891 to garner support for this noble objective. Next, he invited four Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka to come and stay at Bodhgaya, namely: Ven. **Chandajoti**, Ven. **Sumangala**, Ven. **Pemmananda** and Ven. **Sudassana**. They arrived at Bodhgaya in July 1891 and

took up residence in the Burmese Rest House. As the Mahant had property rights to the land in Bodhgaya, he objected to their presence and in February 1893, two of the monks were severely beaten up by his men. Two years later in 1895, when Anagarika Dharmapala attempted to install a Buddha image presented to him by the people of Japan on the upper floor of the Temple, he was assaulted and prevented to do so by the Mahant's men. So the image was kept in the Burmese Rest House. Still the Mahant and some Hindu organizations were not satisfied and tried to get the image removed from the Rest House but the Government did not yield.

In 1906, the Mahant filed a suit seeking to eject the Buddhist monks from the Rest House. Thereafter a long legal battle ensued between the Mahant and the Buddhists, which continued till 1949, when the State of Bihar enacted the Buddha Gaya Temple Management Act, which effectively transferred control of the Temple land and other property to a Management Committee. Two things of the Bill were objectionable; one that the nine-man Management Committee of the Temple would have a Hindu majority, and the other that Buddhist members should be of Indian nationality. In spite of protests by the Maha Bodhi Society, the Bill was passed with an amendment for provision of an Advisory Board in which the majority should be Buddhists and not necessarily all of Indian nationality. This means that Buddhists can only advise on the management of the Mahabodhi Temple but the control and final say belongs to the Hindus!

To the Maha Bodhi Society, there is no justification for the Mahabodhi Temple to be controlled by non-Buddhists just as a Muslim mosque, a Christian church or a Hindu temple were to be controlled by persons of different faiths. Even Indian Noble laureate **Rabindra Nath Tagore** objected by expressing his views as follows: "*I am sure, it will be admitted by all Hindus who are true to their own ideals, that it is an intolerable wrong to allow the Temple raised on the spot where Lord Buddha attained His Enlightenment, to remain under the control of a rival sect, which can neither have an intimate knowledge of, nor sympathy for, the Buddhist religion and its rites of worship.*"

In his article entitled "The Vow Still Remains" in Sambodhi 1996, the **late Ven. Pannarama Mahathera**, *Bhikkhu*-in-charge of Buddhagaya Maha Bodhi Society, revealed the irony that even the Advisory Board which was supposed to be controlled by Buddhists, has only 11 Buddhist members but 14 non-Buddhist members! It is time that these non-Buddhist members should be replaced by representatives from Buddhist organizations, which are really concerned about the development of Bodhgaya, the place of Buddha's Enlightenment. Thus, Dharmapala's vow is not fulfilled and it still remains.

2.5 Objects of Interest [26, 27, 31, 32]

a) Mahabodhi Temple

The Mahabodhi Temple has a long history. Excavations by Cunningham in 1872 suggested three periods in its construction. The first phase of construction by King Asoka during the 3rd century BC was the *Bodhi* Shrine, represented in the bas-relief on the 2nd century BC Bharhut *Stupa*. The second phase of construction during the 1st century AD, involved renovation of the original *Bodhi* Shrine by two pious ladies, **Surangi** and **Nagadevi,** wives of **Sunga** kings. **Huviska**, the Kusana king of the 2nd century AD undertook the third phase of construction. The images of the Buddha originated during this period. Therefore shrines were erected for their installation. Cunningham suggested that the entire Mahabodhi Temple, as seen today, was mainly the structure of the Huviska period (111-138 AD). As it was built over the remains of Asoka's shrine, the Vajrasana Throne retains its original position of the Seat of Enlightenment. In the 7th century AD, renovations were carried out which included placing a new basalt slab over the older plaster throne at the Vajrasana. In the late 19th century, massive renovations were carried out under the able supervision of Cunningham, Beglar and R. L. Mitra to restore the Maha Bodhi Temple, which had fallen into ruins after centuries of vandalism and neglect by its squatter-occupants,

the successor Mahants of Gosain Giri. The magnificent building we see today is the result of the rare devotion and dedication of **Cunningham**, **Beglar** and **Mitra**.

The Mahabodhi Temple is undoubtedly the most exquisite-looking building in Bodhgaya. Standing 52 m high with a base of 15.2 m square, it consists of a straight pyramidal tower surmounted by a *stupa.* At the corners of the base, there arise four smaller towers – miniature replicas of the main spire. The main door faces east and in front of it, there is an imposing ancient gateway decorated with carvings. The niches on the walls of both sides of the Temple contain images of the Buddha. The main shrine hall or Sanctum on the ground floor is reached after passing through a vaulted passage, on both sides of which are stone staircases leading up to a smaller shrine hall on the first floor.

On entering the Sanctum, one comes face-to-face with the great gilded image of the Buddha seated in the earth-touching posture (*bhumi-phassa-mudra*). Just gazing at this magnificent image of our Lord will certainly evoke feelings of joy and reverence in the heart of the pilgrim! This is the result of the faith and devotion in heeding the Buddha's exhortation to "*visit the holy places and look upon them with feelings of reverence*".

The colossal gilded image is from the 10^{th} century AD. Here the Buddha is depicted as sitting on a patterned cushion instead of a lotus. It is supported by a pedestal, decorated with figures of lions alternating with elephants. The patterned cushion is a common feature found in other Buddha images from Eastern India, which was probably copied from this image. Most people are not aware of the fact that this image was not in the temple when archeological explorations were going on in and around Buddhagaya by the then British government. According to an article on "Buddhagaya Sculptures" in the Sambodhi 1993, R. L. Mitra noted that it was in the Mahant's compound. Later on, at the request of **Cunningham** and **Beglar,** it was moved to its present location at the main shrine. If not for the timely intervention of these two gentlemen, this inspiring image would still be wasting in the Mahant's compound instead of its present rightful place for pilgrims to worship!

b) Bodhi Tree (*Bodhidruma*)

The *Bodhi* tree under which the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment is situated behind the Temple. It is a Pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), also known in Pali as '*assattha*'. It is said to have sprung up at the same time when the Buddha was born, i.e., his co-natal (*sahajata*). According to the commentaries, different Buddhas attained Enlightenment seated under different trees of their choice and each of them became the '***Bodhi* tree**' of the particular Buddha during his dispensation. In the present dispensation, only the *Bodhi* tree of Gotama Buddha is reverenced. The site of the *Bodhi* tree is the same for all Buddhas. It is believed that no place on earth can support the weight of the Buddha's Enlightenment. The ground is so firm that it remained unmoved, even as a violent earthquake shook the world and scattered Mara and his army who had come to challenge the *Bodhisatta* for the Seat of Enlightenment. Even Sakka *Devaraja* is unable to travel in the air immediately above it.

From earliest times, kings and commoners have come here to honor it. Being the object of veneration of Buddhists, it naturally became the target of destruction by the enemies of Buddhism. According to Hsüan Tsang, the *Bodhi* tree was first cut down by **Asoka** before his conversion but later out of remorse, he revived the tree by bathing the roots with scented water and milk. Asoka paid homage to the tree so earnestly that his queen, **Tissarakkha**, was filled with jealousy and had it destroyed secretly. Again Asoka had it revived. Thereafter, he built a wall over 3 m high to surround it for protection. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire in the 2nd century BC, the Sunga king **Pusyamitra**, a persecutor of Buddhism, also destroyed the *Bodhi* tree but a sapling of the tree from Sri Lanka was brought back and replanted in the same spot. During the 6th century AD, **Sasanka,** a Hindu king cut down the *Bodhi* tree but sometime later it was replanted with a sapling from the *Bodhi* tree in Sri Lanka by King **Purvavarma** of Magadha, who then built a wall 7.3 m high to surround it. Its remains were 6.1 m high when Hsüan Tsang visited it. In 1876, the old decaying *Bodhi* tree fell down during a storm. **Cunningham** replanted a sapling from it on the same spot. The present *Bodhi* tree is over 130 years old now.

c) *Vajrasana* or Diamond Throne where Buddha sat facing east

The *Vajrasana* is located between the *Bodhi* tree and the Temple. It marks the actual spot where the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment. It is said that the **Buddha sat facing east** with his back to the trunk of the Bodhi tree. According to legend, when the *Bodhisatta* tried sitting on the other three sides of the tree, the ground on which he sat sank down. Only the eastern side held firm, capable of supporting his enlightenment. A more practical reason why the Buddha chose the eastern side was to avoid the afternoon sun from the west, which is quite strong during the month of May. A red sandstone slab measuring 2.3 meters long by 1.3m wide by 0.9m high now marks the site Enlightenment. Pilgrims who visit this spot should spend some time in this conducive place to reflect on the virtues of the Buddha, to attain fullness of faith and calm, followed by mindfulness meditation to develop spiritual insight.

d) The Buddha's Stay at Seven Places after Enlightenment

After attaining Buddhahood on the full-moon night of *Wesak*, as dawn broke, the Buddha uttered a paean of joy (*udana*). While sitting on the *Vajrasana*, he decided to continue sitting on the undefeated throne on which he overcame Mara and fulfilled all his wishes, including the one to become a Buddha.

- **First Week on the Throne (*Pallanka Sattaha*)**

The Buddha sat on the Diamond Throne for seven days in meditation absorbed in the bliss of emancipation (*Arahantship* Fruition). At the end of seven days, he emerged from the absorption and contemplated on the Doctrine of **Dependent Origination** (*Paticca Samuppada)* the whole night.

- **Second Week of the Unblinking Gaze (*Animisa Sattaha*)**

Throughout the second week, as a mark of gratitude to the *Bodhi* Tree for providing him shelter, the Buddha stood gazing at it without

closing his eyes. On the spot where the Buddha stood a shrine was erected by King Asoka. Called the ***Animisilocana Cetiya*** or 'Unblenching Gaze' shrine, it is located on elevated ground within the courtyard in front of the Temple.

- **Third Week on the Walk (*Cankama Sattaha*)**

The third week was spent on walking meditation along a 'jewelled promenade or ***Cankama***' running from east to west between the Diamond throne and the *Animisilocana Cetiya*.

- **Fourth Week in Jewelled House (*Ratanaghara Sattaha*)**

The Buddha spent the fourth week in the 'Jewelled House', reflecting on the ***Abhidhamma***, which deals with absolute truths concerning mental and material processes. As he contemplated on the deep and profound doctrine of the ***Patthana*** or **Conditional Relations**, there arose great rapture in the Omniscient mind, which activated material processes in the body to emit rays of six colours – blue, gold, white, red, pink and a massive brightness of all these assorted colours. This spot is now marked by a small shrine within the compound to the north of the *Cankama.*

- **Fifth Week at Ajapala Nigrodha Tree (*Ajapala Sattaha*)**

During the fifth week, the Buddha sat at the root of the *Ajapala* Banyan tree reflecting on the *Dhamma* and absorbed in the bliss of *Phalasamapatti* (Fruition of *Arahantship*). This Banyan tree was called *Ajapala* because goatherds came for shelter under its shade. Here the Buddha declared the qualities of a true Brahman in reply to a question by a conceited *brahmin*. This site is indicated by a signboard within the courtyard, directly in front of the Temple.

- **Sixth Week at Mucalinda (*Mucalinda Sattaha*)**

After seven days at the *Ajapala* Banyan tree, the Buddha moved to the Mucalinda (*Barringtonia acutangula*) tree, a short distance south of the Temple. There he sat for seven days at the root of the

Mucalinda tree, absorbed in the bliss of *Arahantship*. At that time, there arose an untimely rainstorm and gloom for seven days. Mucalinda, serpent king of the lake, came out and used its coils to encircle the Buddha's body and its hood to cover the Buddha's head thereby protecting the Lord. The site of this episode is at the Mucalinda pond, a short distance south of the Temple.

- **Seventh Week at Rajayatana Tree (*Rajayatana Sattaha*)**

After seven days at the Mucalinda tree, the Buddha moved to the Rajayatana tree (*Buchanania latifolia*) near the Temple. Here he sat at the foot of the tree absorbed in the bliss of *Arahantship* for seven days. At that time, two merchant brothers, **Tapussa** and **Bhallika**, from **Ukkala** in **Myanmar** met the Buddha and offered him rice cakes and honey. They became the first lay disciples and asked the Buddha for an object of worship. Thereupon the Buddha rubbed his head and presented them with eight hairs. The brothers return to their native Myanmar with the precious hair relics, which were later enshrined by the king in **Shwedagon Pagoda** in Yangon. The site of this episode is marked by a signboard just south of the Temple.

e) Sujata Kuti, Site of Lady Sujata's Milk Rice Offering

Just across the new bridge over the river Neranjara is the village of **Bakraur**. Pilgrims visiting this place will come across a grassy mound that is fenced up. This site is popularly known as **Sujata Kuti or Sujatagarh** while the village was known as **Senanigama** during the Buddha's time. In 1973-74, the Archeological Society of India (ASI) undertook excavations of the mound to reveal the remains of an extensive brick *stupa* 65.5m in diameter and 11m high, indicating the religious importance of the place.

According to the ASI Report by Navin Kumar[34], the *stupa* was built in three stages. The last phase of the *stupa* can be assigned to a date between the 8th and 9th century AD, on the basis of terracotta sealing and plaques. It is quite likely that the religious zeal of the Pala Kings

was responsible for the enclosure wall, railing and the gateway. The earliest occupation of the site may be placed in the 1st-2nd century BC, on the basis of fragments of dark grey polished ware found in a partially exposed monastery-like structure towards the northeast of the *stupa*. The presence of this large *stupa* appears to indicate that it is probably the place where the **Lady Sujata offered milk rice** to the *Bodhisatta* prior to Enlightenment since the selection of sites for *stupas* were not arbitrary. Such memorials were erected at places that were traditionally connected with important events in the Buddha's life.

f) Uruvela Forest

The area, which was once a forest, is now a wooded area some distance from *Sujata Kuti*. Here one can find an old building with a dry well in the centre. This site is believed to be the fire-chamber of the **Kassapa brothers**, three matted-hair *Jatilas*, who had a following of one thousand disciples. Here the Buddha tamed the serpent, which inhabited the fire chamber. The taming of the elder Kassapa brother **Uruvela** took a longer time. The Buddha had to employ his psychic powers to convert the misguided *Jatila.* After Uruvela Kassapa became the Buddha's disciple, his brothers, **Nadi** and **Gaya**, followed suit together with their followers. After hearing the **Fire Sermon** preached by the Buddha, the thousand newly ordained *bhikkhus* became ***Arahants.***

g) Pragbodhi, the Place where the Bodhisatta practised Severe Austerities for six years

Prior to Enlightenment, the *Bodhisatta* was staying on the right bank of the river Neranjara in a thickly forested area near **Pragbodhi** (i.e. before Bodhi hill). Tradition says that he sheltered in the small cave now known as **Dungeswari**, halfway up this hill. After undergoing painful and profitless austerity practices for six years, he decided to adopt the Middle Path and moved to the Uruvela forest near the

village of Senanigama, which is the present day village of Bakraur. A short climb up a steep path leads to a small temple near the cave run by Tibetan monks. Inside the **Dungeswari cave** is a skeleton-like statue of the *Bodhisatta* illustrating the result of his six years' practice of self-mortification. The Pragbodhi hill is now known as **Dhongra hill**, which rising about a mile north-east of Bakraur, is about 30 minutes drive on the road towards Rajgir.

h) Temples and Monasteries in Bodhgaya

Bodhgaya is the **fountain of Buddhism**. It occupies an area of only 15 square km, but within this small area are found over thirty monasteries and institutions representing every country in the world with a sizeable Buddhist community. A visit to some of these temples can help one to understand how the religion is practised in different countries according to local culture that does not run counter to the Buddha *Dhamma*. There are also a few *Vipassana* meditation centres, such as the Burmese *Vihara* and the International Meditation Centre and lately the Mahabodhi Meditation Centre, to cater for yogis who wish to spend a meditation retreat at Bodhgaya. The names of Buddhist temples, monasteries and institutions listed in the Buddha Mahotsav 1999 Souvenir Programme are shown below, in alphabetical order:

All India Bhikkhu Sangha, Asian Buddhist Culture Centre, Bangladesh Temple, Buddhagaya Temple Management Committee, Burmese Vihar, Chinese Temple, Daijokyo Japanese Buddhist Temple, Dhamma Bodhi Meditation Centre, Drikyug Charitable Trust, Druk Nawag Thupten Choeling, Indosan Nipponjee Japanese Temple, International Meditation Centre, Jambunad Vihar, Karma Temple, Korea Temple, Maha Bodhi Society, Maha Bhumi Vihara, Maitreya Project, Nav Bauddha Vihar, Panch Sheela Vihar, Root Institute for Wisdom Culture, Royal Bhutan Temple, Sakya Monastery, Sambodhi Welfare and Cultural Society, Shechen Monastery, Taiwan Temple, Tamang Nepal Temple, Thai Bharat Society, Thai Bodhi Kam, Tibetan Temple, Trailokya Centre, Vietnam Temple and Wat Thai Temple.

3. Sarnath, Place of the Buddha's First Sermon

3.1 How to reach there

Sarnath is located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, 30 km from the city of Varanasi (Benares). From Bodhgaya, the distance is 250 km. All distances are approximate.

3.2 Religious Significance [3, 25, 26]

After spending seven weeks at the seven places in Bodhgaya following his Enlightenment, the Buddha was undecided about teaching the *Dhamma* to others as He realized that it was profound and hard to discover, and others would not understand Him. **Brahma Sahampati** who became aware of the Buddha's thoughts pleaded with Him to teach the *Dhamma* otherwise the world would be lost. The Blessed One listened to Brahma Sahampati's pleading and out of compassion decided to go to Benares to preach to the Five Ascetics, namely: **Kondanna, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahanama** and **Assaji**, who had served him for 6 years, but left after he abandoned the path of self-mortification.

Travelling on foot, he arrived at **Deer Park** or **Isipatana** in modern day Sarnath on the full-moon day of ***Asalha***, exactly two months after *Wesak*. When they saw the Buddha coming in the distance, they decided not to welcome him, but as soon as the Buddha approached, they found themselves unable to keep their pact and began to serve him. The Buddha was able to convince them of his Attainment. That very night, the Buddha delivered the historic **First Sermon,** the ***Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*** or Discourse on Turning the Wheel of *Dhamma*, which led to Kondanna attaining the first stage of sainthood at the end of the discourse. The remaining four ascetics attained the first stage of sainthood successively over the next four days. Later, the Buddha preached to them the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* or Discourse on the Characteristics of Non-Self, hearing which they attained *Arahantship* or final sainthood.

In Sarnath too, the Buddha converted the rich man **Yasa** and his 54 friends, who also became *Arahants*. Later, the Buddha dispatched them in various directions to propagate the *Dhamma*, with each to go a separate way. Thus Sarnath became famous as the place of the **First Sermon**, as well as the **founding of the *Sangha*** (Monkhood).

3.3 Historical Background [5, 27]

King Asoka visited Sarnath in 249 BC and erected several monuments to mark his pilgrimage, notably; the ***Dhamek*** *stupa*, ***Dharmarajika*** *stupa* and the Asokan pillar surmounted by the famous **Lion Capital**, which is now the crest of India. During the reign of King Kaniska (78 AD), Sarnath was a centre of religious activity and the famous collosal ***Bodhisatta*** image with a large parasol was installed by the *bhikkhu* **Bala** of Mathura. During the Gupta period (4th-6th century AD), the *Dhamek Stupa* was encased with carved stones, the **Mulagandhakuti** main shrine was enlarged and the famous Preaching Buddha image, a gift of King Kumaragupta, was added. In 520 AD, Sarnath had its share of destruction during the invasion of the Huns under the barbarian Mihirakula. But after the Huns were defeated, Sarnath again flourished under the Buddhist king, **Harsa Vardharna** (606-647 AD) and continued to be a living shrine under the **Pala kings** (8th-12th century AD). The last known patron of Sarnath was **Queen Kumaradevi**, the pious Buddhist wife of King Govindachandra of Benares (1114-1154). She built a large monastery at Sarnath named Dhammacakka Jina Vihara, the ruins of which were exposed during excavations in the early 20th century. Things took a turn for the worst when Muslim hordes overran India at the close of the 12th century AD and started their trail of destruction.

After the Diaspora of the ***Sangha*** in India, Sarnath became deserted and was forgotten for about 600 years. Archeological excavations at the site in the 1800's by **Major Kittoe** revealed evidence of a tragic period of massive and sudden destruction by fire. The discoveries of remains of ready-made wheaten cakes and wheat and other grain in some of the cells suggest that the conflagration had been so sudden

and rapid, as to force the monks to abandon their very food. In short, the evidence would indicate that the destruction was caused by fire applied by the hands of an **exterminating adversary** rather than by any ordinary conflagration! According to Cunningham, so vividly was the **impression of a great final catastrophe** by fire fixed in Major Kittoe's mind that he summed his conclusion as follows: "*All have been sacked and burnt, priests, temples, idols, all together. In some places, bones, iron, timber, idols, etc., are all fused into huge heaps; and this has happened more than once*."

In 1794, Sarnath came to the notice of the world under tragic circumstances. **Jagat Singh**, a minister in Benares, dismantled the famous Dharmarajika *stupa* as a convenient way of collecting bricks and stones for building a housing colony, which he named Jagatjanj, after himself. When the *stupa* was pulled down, workmen found at a depth of 8.3 m, a stone box containing a green marble casket. Inside it were human relics, presumably those of the Buddha enshrined there by King Asoka. Following Hindu rites, Jagat Singh consigned them into the Ganges River, where they were lost forever.

This act of vandalism would have gone unnoticed but for a report about the said discovery by **Jonathan Duncan**, Commissioner of Benares, which appeared in the 'Asiatic Researches'. Soon public attention was attracted to the ruins of Sarnath and in 1815 **Col. C. Mackenzie** began explorations and discovered some sculptures, which are now kept at the Calcutta Museum. In 1835-36, Cunningham carried out excavations and recovered over forty sculptures and carved stones. Another tragedy struck when they were carted away in his absence together with sixty cartloads of stones from the shrines as construction material for two bridges and some buildings in Benares. Further excavations were continued on and off from 1851 to 1922**,** which exposed the **Dhamek** *stupa*, the **Dharmarajik*a*** *stupa*, **Mulagandhakuti** shrine, **Asokan** pillar and the ruins of several monasteries. The first four monuments are considered **sacred** because of their association with the Buddha. The fifth sacred spot is probably the sunken shrine of **Pancayatana**, which is believed by some monk teachers to be the site where the Buddha preached to the rich man **Yasa**.

3.4 Objects of Interest [5, 27]

a) Dhamek *Stupa*

Dhamek *stupa*, the most imposing structure in Sarnath, is cylindrical in shape, 28.5 m in basal diameter and 43.6 m tall. During the Gupta period, the lower portion was encased in stone, having beautiful carvings all round. The design consists of a broad band of *Swastikas* worked into different geometrical patterns, with a chiselled lotus wreath running above and below the *Swastikas*. Cunningham who explored Sarnath in 1835-36 recorded the following:

"*On the authority of the work-people, the dilapidated state of the lower part of the Dhamek stupa is due entirely to the* ***meanness of Jagat Singh****, who, to save a few rupees in the purchase of new stones, deliberately destroyed the beautiful facing of this ancient tower. As each stone was slowly detached from the monument by cutting out all the iron cramps, the actual saving to Jagat Singh could have been but little; but the defacement to the tower was very great, and, as the stones were removed at once, the damage done to the tower is quite irreparable*!" (ASI Report 1862-63-64-65, Vol. I)

While boring a shaft in the centre of the *stupa* in search of relics, Cunningham found remains of an earlier *stupa* of Mauryan bricks. It was probably the *stupa* raised by Asoka when he visited Sarnath. No bodily relics were found inside this *stupa*, but a slab with Buddha's creed '*ye dhamma hetuppabhava, etc.*' in the characters of the 6^{th} and 7^{th} century was discovered. This appears to suggest its close association with the Buddha's teachings. According to an inscription of the Pala king Mahipala I (1026 AD), its original name was Dhammacakka *stupa*. The Archeological Survey of India used this finding to support its claim that this spot marks the site of the First Sermon but it is not convincing enough. Burmese monks believe that **Dhammarajika Stupa,** the **relic *stupa*** raised by King Asoka, is the site of the **First Sermon**. According to them, **Dhamek Stupa** is a memorial *stupa* raised by King Asoka to mark the site where the Buddha preached the second sermon '***Anattalakkhana Sutta***', hearing which the Five Ascetics attained Arahantship.

b) Dharmarajika *Stupa*

The ruins of the Dharmarajika *stupa* is a short distance north of the Dhamek *stupa*, and consists of a circular base of what remained after the wanton act of **destruction by Jagat Singh**. The original *stupa* built by King Asoka was 13.4 m in diameter but was enlarged twice during the Gupta period so that the base we see today is larger. The Dhammarajika *stupa* as its name indicates, was believed to be built by King Asoka to enshrine the **bodily relics** of the Buddha at the time of his re-distributing the relics from the seven original *stupas* and enshrining them in a number of other *stupas* at different places. It is the only relic *stupa* in Deer Park, the Dhamek *stupa* being only a memorial *stupa*. This fact supports the view that the site must have been the venue of a very significant event such as the First Sermon. The Burmese are of the opinion that the Dhammarajika *stupa* marks the site of the First Sermon while the Dhamek *stupa* marks the site of the preaching of the second sermon, the ***Anattalakkhana Sutta***.

Seeing the vestige of this once-glorious *stupa* reduced to ground zero at the site where Buddha preached the First Sermon will surely arouse apprehension among the pious disciples and spur them to practise the Buddha's Teachings in earnest.

c) *Mulagandhakuti* (Main Shrine)

North of the *Dhammarajika stupa* are the ruins of the Main Shrine, site of the **Mulagandhakuti** or First Perfumed Chamber where the Buddha spent the first rains-retreat. According to the Dhammapada Commentary, the rich man **Nandiya** was the donor and as soon as the Buddha accepted the gift, a celestial mansion arose in Tavatimsa Heaven awaiting its owner, Nandiya. The main shrine was a square building, 18.3 m on each side, with the entrance facing east. The area between the ruins of the Main Shrine and the Dharmarajika *stupa* is believed to be the site of the *Cankama*, the promenade where the Buddha did his walking meditation. This belief is supported by the discovery of the famous colossal *Bodhisatta* image installed at this site by ***Bhikkhu*** **Bala** of Mathura.

d) Asokan Pillar

A short distance to the west of Mulagandhakuti under a flat roof and enclosed by railings stands the 2 m high base of the Asokan pillar. The original pillar was 15 m high and surmounted by the famous **Lion Capital,** which can be seen in Sarnath Museum. This pillar is believed to mark the site where the Buddha assembled the *Sangha* comprising sixty *Arahants* and exhorted them to go in different directions to spread the Teaching. On the pillar is an inscription, which says: "*Let no one cause a division in the Sangha*." During Asoka's time, *bhikkhus* from many sects lived in Sarnath and it is believed that he issued this ***Sanghabhedaka*** (Cause a Schism in the Order) Edict to promote harmony among the various Buddhist sects.

e) Sunken Shrine of *Pancayatana*

To the east of the Dhammarajika *stupa,* is a sunken shrine under a concrete platform. It is made of terra cotta bricks and modelled to resemble one of the four-squares temples of the Gupta period, called '*pancayatana*' or 'five bases'. The site of this sunken shrine of *Pancayatana* is believed by the Burmese to be the place where the Buddha preached to the rich man Yasa. Being not as well known as the four main monuments of Sarnath, it has fewer visitors. As a result, it is a quieter and more conducive place for meditation.

f) Mulagandha Kuty Vihara[38]

About 500m east of the Dhamek *stupa* stands the Mulagandha Kuty *Vihara*, built by the Maha Bodhi Society of India in 1931 under the untiring efforts of **Anagarika Dharmapala** with the financial assistance of his chief benefactor **Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Foster** of Hawaii. On the day of opening, the sacred relics of the Buddha unearthed in Taxila in 1913-14, were presented by the Director General of Archeology representing the Government to the Maha Bodhi Society. In 1913, British archaeologist **Sir John Marshall**

(1876-1958) made a significant discovery in the ancient city of **Taxila** in northern India. While excavating the ruins near the ***Dhammarajika Stupa*** in the **Chir Tope** mound at Taxila, 40km from Islamabad in Pakistan, he found the bone relics of the Buddha that had been enshrined during the Kushana period in 2nd century AD. Sixteen years later, **A. H. Longhurst** discovered another set of bone relics in **Nagarjunakonda** South India.

These two sets of relics are presently enshrined in an underground chamber under the Preaching Buddha image and are taken out every year during *Kathina* for worship. A famous Japanese artist, Kosetsu Nosu spent three years from 1932-35 painting the beautiful Ajanta style frescoes on both walls of the v*ihara*. A British Buddhist, **B L Broughton** was the chief donor for this splendid work of beautifying the *vihara*. A short distance outside the *vihara* is a newly constructed shrine with life-size images, depicting Buddha's First Sermon to the Five Ascetics.

g) Sarnath Archeological Museum (Closed on Monday)

The museum houses antiquities recovered from the ruins at Deer Park during excavations from 1905 onwards. Inside the museum, numerous sculptures of the Buddha and *Bodhisatta*, mostly of the Gupta period (4th-5th centuries AD) are displayed. The four most important sculptures on display are described as follows:

- **Lion Capital**

On entering the main hall, one sees the most magnificent sculpture of **Mauryan art** – the Lion Capital, which once crowned the Asokan Pillar at Deer Park. This polished sandstone sculpture is 2.3 m tall and consists of four lions sitting back to back on a circular abacus about 0.3 m high. The abacus has four running animals, each separated by a *Dhammacakka* wheel on its side, namely: Bull representing the Buddha's birth sign; Elephant representing his conception as Maya Devi dreamt that an elephant entered her womb;

Horse representing the *Bodhisatta*'s renunciation as he left home on his horse Kanthaka; Lion representing his First Sermon. The four lions that surmount the Capital represent the roar of the Buddha in the four directions. The Lion Capital is the **crest of India** and the *Dhammacakka* Wheel is the emblem of its **national flag**.

- **Colossal Bodhisatta Image**

This colossal standing image is of red sandstone donated by the *bhikkhu* Bala in AD 81 during the reign of King Kaniska and represents the best tradition of Mathuran art. Behind the statue is a stone shaft, which once supported a beautifully carved umbrella. The stone umbrella can also be seen in the main hall.

- **Buddha's Life Panels**

There is a sculptured panel showing the four principal events, namely: Birth, Enlightenment, First Sermon and *Mahaparinibbana* of the Lord Buddha. Another panel illustrates the eight events in the life of the Buddha, namely, the four principal events and the four miracles - the great miracle at **Sravasti**, the descent from Heaven at **Sankasya**, the taming of the drunken elephant Nalagiri at **Rajagaha** and the offering of honey to the Buddha by the monkeys at **Vesali**.

- **Preaching Buddha Image**

The seated Buddha image in *Dhammacakka mudra* or Preaching posture is one of the most beautiful creations of Gupta art. This famous sculpture was a gift of **King Kumaragupta** who ruled from AD 414-455. The halo around the head is carved with floral designs and has two celestial figures on both upper corners. Inset at the bottom are seven figures, representing the Five Ascetics plus the Queen and her son in kneeling position, paying homage to the *Dhammacakka* wheel. A picture of this sculpture can be seen on the cover of Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda's book, "The *Dhammapada*".

h) Mahabodhi Society

The credit for restoring Sarnath into a living shrine goes to **Anagarika Dharmapala**, founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. He established the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath located on the left of the **Mulagandhakuti Vihara**, which it oversees, in addition to the Mahabodhi schools, college, library and training school for monks and nuns. Inside the Society building is a museum displaying photos and various paraphernalia belonging to the late Anagarika Dharmapala. Lately the Society has constructed a hospital to cater for the poor patients around Sarnath.

i) Chaukhandi

This is the first monument to be seen as one enters Sarnath. This mass of brickwork with an octagonal tower on top is what remains of an ancient *stupa*. The tower was constructed to commemorate the visit of Hamuyan, father of Akbar Khan to Sarnath in 1588 AD. This site is believed to be the place where the Buddha stopped to let the Five Ascetics see him and welcome him as he entered the Deer Park.

j) Temples and Monasteries in Sarnath

There are several modern temples and monasteries for the pilgrim to visit in Sarnath, namely: the Burmese *vihara*, Chinese temple, Japanese temple, Korean temple, Thai temple and three Tibetan monasteries. The Burmese monastery is called the Dhammacakka Vihara and was established by **Ven. Chandramani** of Kushinagar. The present abbot is **Ven. U Wannadhaza**, a Burmese Sayadaw, who has been in Sarnath for many years. Lately, the *vihara* has added a new wing to accommodate pilgrims visiting Sarnath. In 2008, the monastery celebrated the centenary of its founding.

4. Kusinara, Place of the Buddha's Passing Away

4.1 How to reach there

Kusinara or Kushinagar is in the village of **Kasia** in Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh. The nearest town is **Gorakhpur**, 55 km away. By road, Kushinagar is 130 km south of Lumbini, 250 km east of Sravasti and 250 km north of Patna. All distances are approximate. There are now good hotels for pilgrims to stay at Kushinagar.

4.2 Religious Significance [3, 4, 25]

Three months before he reached the age of eighty, the Buddha renounced his will to live at the Capala Shrine in **Vesali**. Travelling in stages via **Pava** where he ate his last meal offered by the smith **Cunda**, he reached the final resting-place at the *Sala* grove of the Mallas by the bank of the **Hirannavati** River in **Kushinagar**. There on the full-moon day of *Wesak* in 543 BC, the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinbbana*, the passing away into *Nibbana* wherein the elements of clinging do not arise (i.e. no more rebirth). His last convert was the wandering ascetic **Subhadda** and his last words to the *bhikkhus* were: "*Handa* '*dani bhikkhave amantayami vo: Vaya-dhamma sankhara. Appamadena sampadetha*." (**Translation**: "Indeed, *bhikkhus*, I declare this to you: It is the nature of all conditioned things to perish. Accomplish all your duties with mindfulness.")

The Buddha was lying on his right side between two Sala trees with his head to the north when he breathed his last. After his *Mahaparinibbana*, his body was taken into the town by the northern gate and out through the eastern gate to the consecration ground of the Mallas called **Makutabandhana**. They were unable to light the funeral pyre until Ven. **Maha Kassapa** came and paid his respects. After the cremation, the relics were divided into eight equal portions by the brahmin **Dona**, who distributed them to eight clans, namely:

- King **Ajatasattu** of Magadha,
- **Licchavis** of Vesali,
- **Sakyans** of Kapilavatthu,
- **Bulians** of Allakappa,
- **Koliyans** of Ramagama,
- Brahman of **Vethadipa**,
- **Mallas** of Pava and
- **Mallas** of Kushinagar.

Dona himself kept the urn used for dividing the relics. When the **Moriyas** of Pipphalavana arrived, it was too late as all the relics had been distributed, so they took from there the ashes. Returning home, these men raised *stupas* to honour them. So it came about that there were eight *stupas* for the relics, a ninth for the urn, and a tenth for the ashes.

4.3 Historical Background [5, 27, 35]

During the Buddha's time, Kushinagar was described by Ven. Ananda as "*this little mud-walled town, this back-woods town, this branch township*". After the *Mahaparinibbana* of the Buddha, it became an important religious centre as Buddhism spread in India. As one of the four pilgrimage places mentioned by the Buddha, it attracted devout Buddhists from all over India and abroad. King Asoka visited Kushinagar in 249 BC and raised several *stupas* and pillars at the site. But by the time Hsüan Tsang visited Kushinagar in 637 AD, the place was in ruins and its towns and villages waste and desolate with few inhabitants. He saw the *Sala* trees under which the Buddha passed into *Mahaparinibbana*, the *vihara* containing the Reclining Buddha image and beside it the 61 m tall *stupa* built by Asoka-raja, in a ruinous state with a stone pillar in front. Further to the north, after crossing the Hirannavati river was a *stupa* marking the cremation site. Yet Kushinagar continued to be a living shrine until the 12th century AD but after the Muslim conquest of India, it became deserted and eventually fell into ruins and was forgotten.

After a silence of more than half a millennium, **Dr. H. Buchanan,** an officer of the East India Company visited it in the course of his survey-work early in 1811-12. He mentions it by the name of **Kasia**, as consisting of hardly a hundred huts with a police station. He saw the ruins and described them, but, like the local people, he was little aware of their identity and their possible significance to the Buddhist world. In 1854, H. H. Wilson casually suggested the identity of Kushinagar and Kasia, but it was only **Alexander Cunningham**, the Archaeological Surveyor who had the deep insight into Buddhist geography to place the identification on solid grounds in the course of his visit in **1861-62**. The village-name was pronounced to him variously as Kusia or Kasia, instead of the 'Kesiya' of Buchanan. The local names of the ruins and mounds engaged his attention. The main site was called **Matha-kuar-ka-kot** (instead of **Matakumar** of Buchanan) or the fort of Matha-kuar, who according to local belief was represented in the large stone image of a seated Buddha image lying unsheltered on a low mound near by. A kilometre and a half to the east stood the large hillock of brick ruins locally known by the name of **Ramabhar Tila** (or mound).

It was difficult for Cunningham to read the correct historical significance behind these names, though he tried to interpret the name **Mathakuar** to mean the '**dead prince**', thus referring by implication to Buddha who belonged .to the princely family of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu and died at the place. Fifteen years later Cunningham's assistant **Carlleyle** carried out extensive digging at the site and completely exposed the great central stupa and, most important of all, discovered, right at its front, the famous reclining statue of Buddha, the Nirvana statue buried in the debris of the ruins of an oblong shrine.

Though the location of ancient Kushinagar thus appeared to be quite certain, doubts were still raised about its accuracy. Better-planned excavations were therefore, undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1904-07 under **J. P. R. Vogel** and in 1910-12 by **Hirananda Shastri**. As a result numerous brick buildings were discovered clustering round the great central monuments and representing monasteries and secondary stupas and shrines. These excavations yielded irrefutable proofs of the identity of Kushinagar

and of the monuments in numerous inscriptions in the form of seals and a copper plate, the former referring to the Mahaparinibbana Vihara and the latter to the Mahaparinibbana Stupa itself. Although none of these records makes any direct mention of the name of Kushinagar, Brahmi writings on the copper plate stated that: “The Lord Buddha passed away here on this site” thereby confirming it as the place of the Buddha’s *Mahaparinibbana*.

4.4 Management of Mahaparinibbana Temple

In recent times, the first Buddhist to occupy Kushinagar was the **Ven. Mahavira**, an Indian national who was ordained as a monk in Sri Lanka, in 1890. He was responsible for restoring Kushinagar back to its rightful place as a sacred shrine. Ven. Mahavira repaired the main temple and built a *vihara* and *Dhamma* hall in 1902-03. After him came the **Ven. U Chandramani** from **Akyab** (**Sittwe**) in Arakan (Rakkhine State), Myanmar. He met Ven. Mahavira in 1895 while studying in Calcutta. Impressed by the keenness of the young monk, Ven. Mahavira made arrangements to sponsor his studies in India and Burma. Upon completion he returned to Kushinagar to assist Ven. Mahavira.

After the demise of his predecessor, Ven. U Chandramani continued the noble work. He succeeded in taking over the management of the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple from the Government after it was confirmed to be the site of the Buddha’s *Parinibbana.* Later he started educational institutions for the local people and reviving the tradition of ***Buddha Jayanti***, which was celebrated for the first time in Kushinagar in 1924. Ven. U Chandramani passed away in 1972 and was succeeded by his disciple, **Ven. U Gyaneshwar (U Nyanissara)**, a Myanmar monk who continues the noble task of taking care of the holy site. In 2002, the Myanmar Government awarded **Bhaddanta Gyaneshwar** the title ‘***Aggamahapandita’*** in recognition his distinguished services and in November 2005, he was conferred the title ‘***Aggamaha Sadhamma Jotikadhaja***’ on the occasion of his 70th birthday anniversary.

4.5 Objects of Interest [27, 35]

a) **Mahaparinibbana Temple and Nirvana Buddha**

The present Temple was built by the Indian Government in 1956 as part of the Commemoration of the 2500th year of *Mahaparinibbana* or 2500 BE (Buddhist Era). The old temple restored by **Carlleyle** was too small to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims visiting it. Inside this temple, one can see the famous Reclining Buddha image lying on its right side with the head to the north.

The statue of Buddha entering Nirnana is 6.1 m long and rests on a 7.3 m long stone couch. On the front side of the couch are three sculptures, believed to represent Ven. **Ananda** near the feet and **Ven. Subhadda** at the middle. The figure with long hair near the face of the Buddha is believed to represent a Malla chief.

At the centre is an inscription of the 5th century AD, which states the statue was, "*a gift of the monk Haribala to the Mahavihara and that it was fashioned by Dinna*". This 1500-year old Reclining Buddha image was executed out of one block of red sandstone brought in from Mathura during the Gupta period. It was Carlleyle who discovered it in 1876 in a dilapidated shattered condition and successfully pieced together the numberless fragments found scattered about. This statue bears the 32 marks of the Great Man (*Mahapurisa*) and can evoke different feelings in one's mind, depending on where one stands to look at it.

- In front of the face, one can discern a calm and serene mood in the face. At a certain angle above the head, one can even disern a smile in the lips of the figure.
- Near the middle part of the body, one can discern a mood of suffering in the face.
- At the feet, one can discern the scene of the Buddha passing away, without any pain in mind or body..

b) Mahaparinibbana or Nirvana *Stupa*

This *stupa* beside the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple is a restoration of the Main *stupa* exposed during excavations by Carlleyle in 1876. When examined to a depth of 4.3 m, it revealed a copper plate and other objects from the Gupta period. The inscription on the plate in Sanskrit mentioned that the monk **Haribala** deposited these objects in the Nirvana ***stupa***. Hsüan Tsang, who visited Kusinara in 637 AD, mentioned that the Nirvana *stupa* was built by King Asoka. He also saw in front of it, a stone pillar to record the ***Nirvana of Tathagata*** but it bore no date. The Nirvana *stupa*, is believed to be erected originally by the Mallas, to enshrine the Buddha's relics, and subsequently enlarged by **King Asoka** and later during the Gupta period. The *Mahaparinibbana stupa* was renovated in 1927 with donations of a Myanmar devotee, **U Po Kyo**, and is 23 m tall.

c) Origin and Meaning of Matha Kuar Shrine

In the previous edition of this book, the author identified the Matha Kuar shrine as the place where the Buddha asked Ven. Ananda three times before the latter would go to the nearby stream to fetch him some water to drink. **This is incorrect**. The abovementioned event happened near Pava (see page 167). According to the Venerable **Pimbure Samitha Thero** of the Japan-Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple in Kushinagar, Lord Buddha took a brief rest at the site of the Matha Kuar shrine before proceeding to the Upavattana Sala Grove where he entered *Mahaparinibbana.* Here he preached the *Dhamma* to his disciples and said that he too was a human being subject to old age and various kinds of diseases in this world in order to arouse urgency in them. But he reminded that he had gained supreme knowledge and wisdom surpassing any other being in this world.

This place is called **Matha Kuar** and a shrine has been erected and installed with a colossal Buddha image in earth-touching posture (*bhumiphassa mudra*). This 3.05-m tall statue is carved out of one block of blue stone from the Gaya region and is about 1,000 years

old. The early chapel, which originally housed the Buddha image, formed part of a large quadrangular monastery (no trace of it is now visible). According to an inscription, it was constructed in the tenth century AD during the reign of a local Kalachuri chief. In 1927 Ven. U Chandramani built the present temple by out of donations of two Myanmar devotees, **U Po Kyo** and **U Po Hlaing**. It is located 0.4 km southwest of the *Mahaparinibbana* Temple.

Regarding the meaning of the name '**Matha Kuar**' (or Matakumar according to Buchanan), Cunningham was probably correct when he interpreted it as **'Dead Prince'** in reference to the colossal seated image in blue stone representing the Buddha. H. B. W. Garrick, an assistant of Cunningham, who visited the place in 1880-81 reported as follows: "This statue is set up lately by the local authorities at a distance of about 400 yards from the Main Temple and is called by the villagers 'Matha Kuar'. It is now very devoutly worshipped by many sects of Hindus, who bring offerings of ghee and betel with which they besmear the face and sprinkle the figure; there is also to be seen, occasionally, a profuse supply of flower garlands about it. The Nirvana figure is also an object of worship, but there are iron gates to the chamber where it is enshrined, which can only be opened to worshippers on the payment of a fee; and that being an expensive luxury, it is indulged in by few amongst the wealthier classes, and the ascetic Buddha's popularity is chiefly owing to its being situated in the open air, unguarded by priests and accessible without payment."

d) Cremation Stupa or Makutabandhana Cetiya

After paying homage to the body of the Buddha for six days, the Mallas carried it to the **Makuta-bandhana**, the traditional place for crowning their chieftains, where they cremated it. The cremation ceremony is described in Part VI of the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, which also describes the partitioning of the Buddha's relics by the brahmin Dona. The Cremation *stupa* was raised by the Mallas some time after the Buddha's cremation and repaired in the 3rd century BC

by Asoka and again in the 5th century AD during the reign of Gupta King Kumaragupta.
When Cunningham visited the site in 1861-62, it was just a big mound called **Ramabhar Tila** built of large bricks and stood about 15m above the fields. (Note: When Cunningham discovered the place, the Hindus had erected a temple dedicated to the Hindu deity **Ramabhar Bhavani** at the site. Although the temple was removed later, the *stupa* is still known as '**Ramabhar**' to the locals).

The *stupa* consists of a circular drum 34m in diameter resting on a 47m-diameter platform. The mound had been thoroughly excavated 9 years earlier by someone. This very extensive excavation consisted of a circular well over 3m in diameter and about 15m deep, sunk in the centre of the mound, also three trenches cut through it; one of these trenches extended nearly to the ground level, the other two were smaller. During later excavations, a large number of clay seals inscribed with Buddhist verses were discovered which confirmed that it was the cremation site. It is about 1.6 km east of the Matha Kuar Shrine along the main road. In recent times, the area around the Cremation *stupa* has been planted with grass and is well maintained for the benefit of pilgrims.

e) Memorial *Stupa* of Ven. Mahavira, founder of Kushinagar

Ven. Mahavira was the **first Hindu** in modern times to become a **Buddhist monk**. Prior to this, he was a wrestler and while traveling in Sri Lanka he was attracted to Buddhism and ordained as a monk in 1890. In 1891 he returned to India and took up permanent residence in Kushinagar, which was then deserted after archeological excavations in 1876 by Carlleyle. He repaired the Mahaparinibbana Temple, which was in a neglected condition and turned it into a **pilgrimage site**, attracting many pilgrims, particularly the **Burmese** Buddhists. With the financial assistance of the Burmese, he bought the plot of land beside the Mahaparinibbana Temple and constructed a Rest House for the convenience of pilgrims in 1902 followed by a *Vihara* in 1903, which was the first modern *Vihara* to be erected anywhere in India. Ven. Mahavira died in March 1919 and his ashes

are buried in a small brick *stupa* located at a corner of the land behind the Mahaparinibbana Temple.

f) Shrine Depicting the Conversion of Dr. Ambedkar into Buddhism by Sayadaw U Chandramani on 14 Oct 1956

The most memorable event in the Buddhist world in modern times was the conversion of **380,000 Dalits** (Untouchables) into Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This historic event took place on 14 October 1956 at a 14-acre vacant plot of land now known as '**Diksha Bhumi**' in Nagpur**,** Maharashtra. The person chosen by Dr. Ambedkar to be his *Dhamma* Guru and administer the Three Refuges and Five Precepts was none other than **Sayadaw U Chandramani** of Kushinagar, whom Dr. Ambedkar regarded as his **true mentor**. The Nagpur conversion was the **greatest peaceful conversion in mankind** because never in the history of any religion in the world has so many people at one time and at the instance of one man, voluntarily changed their religion. To commemorate this historic event, a shrine was built at the Kushinagar Burmese Temple where Sayadaw U Chandramani was Abbot. Inside the shrine, one sees a statue of Dr. Ambedkar prostrating in front of a statue of his *Dhamma* Guru Sayadaw U Chandramani, **depicting his initiation** as a lay disciple. Two months later, Dr. Ambedkar passed away in New Delhi. Sayadaw U Chandramani continued his untiring efforts to rebuild the Buddha *Sasana* in India as well as in neighboring Nepal. He passed away in the Kushinagar Burmese Temple on 8 May 1972 at the age of 97, having lived nearly 80 years as a *bhikkhu* in India **serving the cause of the *Sasana*** with great determination and patience, despite all the hardships he faced including a very poor diet, poor living conditions and environment.

g) Buddhist Monasteries in Kushinagar

In recent times there have been some developments in Kushinagar with the construction of several monasteries and other modern facilities for pilgrims. While in Kushinagar, pilgrims should visit the *viharas*, namely: Myanmar *Vihara*, Japan-Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, Chinese Monastery, Wat Thai and Tibetan Monastery, to

pay their respects and seek assistance from the monks there to learn more about the holy site.